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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: emerging issues: "Mainstreaming disability in the development agenda"

Mainstreaming disability in the development agenda

Note by the Secretariat

Summary

The present note is prepared pursuant to Economic and Social Council resolution 2006/18, in which the Council decided to include the item entitled "Emerging issues" in the programme of work of the Commission for Social Development. The Bureau of the Commission, after consultation with its regional groups, decided that the topic for discussion under "Emerging issues" (agenda item 3 (c)) would be "Mainstreaming disability in the development agenda". This note has been prepared by the Secretariat to facilitate the discussion. It provides an overview of the background, practicalities and resources related to mainstreaming disability in the development agenda in the context of the recent adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

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I. Background

1. Mainstreaming disability in the development agenda is a strategy for achieving equality for persons with disabilities. Governments, international organizations, organizations of persons with disabilities and other civil society organizations are working with renewed vigour towards the goal of equality following the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, in December 2006 (General Assembly resolution 61/106, annex I). The documents and recommendations mentioned in the present note represent a small part of the existing guidance on mainstreaming of persons with disabilities into the international development agenda.

2. There are approximately 650 million persons with disabilities in the world, or 10 per cent of the global population. An estimated 80 per cent of these persons live in developing countries, many in conditions of poverty. In both developed and developing countries, evidence suggests that persons with disabilities are disproportionately represented among the world's poor and tend to be poorer than their counterparts without disabilities. It is estimated that of the world's poorest people, meaning those who live on less than one dollar a day and who lack access to basic necessities such as food, clean water, clothing and shelter, 1 in 5 is a person with disabilities.[1] Given that persons with disabilities represent such a significant portion of the population, and are more likely to live in poverty than their peers without disabilities, ensuring that they are integrated into all development activities is essential in order to achieve international development goals.

3. There is a strong bidirectional link between poverty and disability. Poverty may cause disability through malnutrition, poor health care, and dangerous living conditions. Case studies in developing countries show that higher disability rates are associated with higher rates of illiteracy, poor nutritional status, lower immunization coverage, lower birth weight, higher rates of unemployment and underemployment, and lower occupational mobility.[1] Disability can cause poverty by preventing the full participation of persons with disabilities in the economic and social life of their communities, especially if the appropriate supports and accommodations are not available.[2]

4. In addition to representing a key target group under Millennium Development Goal 1 ("Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger"), persons with disabilities are also key targets when considering each of the other Goals. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization estimates that 98 per cent of children with disabilities in developing countries do not attend school.[3] Women with disabilities experience double discrimination as women and as persons with disabilities. Children with disabilities in poor developing countries often have little to no access to health care. Many maternal health facilities around the world lack staff with knowledge of providing care to pregnant women with disabilities, and information on the topic is scarce. Effective strategies to combat diseases such as

[1] Ann Elwan, "Poverty and disability: a survey of the literature" (World Bank, 1999), available from http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPOVERTY/Resources/WDR/Background/elwan.pdf.

[2] World Bank website on data and statistics on disability, at http://www.worldbank.org/disability.

[3] Website of the Flagship on Education for All and the Right to Education for Persons with Disabilities: Towards Inclusion, at http://www.unesco.org/education/efa/know_sharing/flagship_initiatives/disability_last_version.shtml.

HIV/AIDS and malaria include the provision of health education, prevention and promotion; however, this information is often not available in formats accessible to persons with varying types of disabilities. Issues of environmental sustainability are particularly relevant to persons with disabilities who may have less capacity to adapt to environmental changes in their surroundings. Persons with disabilities continue to be largely absent from international development efforts, and there is an urgent need for existing and future partnerships for development, addressed by the eighth Goal, to include them in all activities.

5. The high numbers of persons with disabilities who are disproportionately represented among the world's most marginalized groups have a profound significance with respect to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, which thus far seems to have gone largely unnoticed in the international discourse on the Goals. The Millennium Development Goals, in fact, cannot be achieved if persons with disabilities are not included in these efforts. We are now at the halfway point to the target date of 2015, yet in *The Millennium Development Goals Report 2007*,[4] persons with disabilities as a group are not mentioned, and the issue of disability is briefly mentioned twice. *The Human Development Report 2006*[5] discusses persons with disabilities within the development context of sanitation. It is hoped that current efforts to integrate disability within the United Nations system will increase the importance of persons with disabilities in such reports in the future.

II. Practicalities of mainstreaming disability in development

6. There is currently no officially accepted definition of mainstreaming disability. However, the experience with defining gender mainstreaming may provide insight about how to proceed to define disability mainstreaming. The concept of gender mainstreaming was defined in July 1997, by the Economic and Social Council in the agreed conclusions 1997/2 on mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes of the United Nations system, as follows:

> Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in any area and at all levels. It is a strategy for making the concerns and experiences of women as well as of men an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres, so that women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal of mainstreaming is to achieve gender equality.

The process of mainstreaming disability in the development agenda may be viewed in a similar manner.

7. Given the wide scope of contexts, actors and activities required to fully include persons with disabilities in the development agenda, it may be helpful to consider the process in the light of the "no-gap policy". The no-gap policy is a

[4] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *The Millennium Development Goals Report 2007* (New York, 2007), available from http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/mdg2007.pdf.

[5] United Nations Development Programme, *The Human Development Report 2006* (New York, 2006), available from http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2006/.

concept which illustrates that no entity, whether it be part of the United Nations system, a Government ministry or a non-governmental organization (NGO), can achieve the goal of equality for persons with disabilities on its own. Rather, an interconnected network of actors is required to reach this goal. For example, in order for a person with disabilities using a wheelchair to access decent work, the person needs to be able to physically move in and out of his or her home; needs to be able to access the public space and transportation; and needs to be able to access the work facilities, in terms of both the built environment and its information and communications systems. Different entities need to ensure that their respective spheres of responsibility provide the necessary opportunities and access to persons with disabilities, on an equal basis with others. If any one element of the network fails in this obligation, persons are not able to reap the benefit from the other elements. In order for them to be integrated and included in the development agenda, a comprehensive and holistic approach is required, demonstrating why a mainstreaming strategy is useful and necessary.

8. Efforts to incorporate and include persons with disabilities into the development activities have been gaining momentum over the past several decades. For example, in 1997, the United Nations, in collaboration with the National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health (STAKES) in Finland, published *Disability Dimension in Development Action: Manual on Inclusive Planning*.[6] The Manual is meant to serve as a tool with which to translate development theories into good practices, and "presents step-by-step advice on how to improve the quality of development policies, programmes and projects by exercising sensitivity to the disability dimension at various phases of the mainstream development programme or project planning cycle".

9. Another publication that provides guidelines for integrating and including persons with disabilities into society is the *Handbook for Parliamentarians on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol: From Exclusion to Equality, Realizing the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*.[7] The Handbook, which was jointly prepared by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Inter-Parliamentary Union, provides practical guidelines to assist "parliamentarians and others in efforts to realize the Convention so that persons with disabilities can achieve the transition from exclusion to equality".

10. Various national and regional development agencies, as well as NGOs, have issued publications and strategic plans addressing the inclusion of persons with disabilities in development. In addition, the Internet provides ever-increasing sources of information on persons with disabilities in development. The adoption and eventual entry into force of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities should provide impetus for further study and practice on this critical development issue within international, regional, national and local organizations.

11. Currently there are few examples of mainstreaming disability in development activities but this situation is expected to change rapidly following the adoption of

[6] Revised online version 2003 available from http://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/toolaction/FF-DisalibilityDim0103_b1.pdf.

[7] HR/PUB/07/6, available from the United Nations Enable website at http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=110.

the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The integration of persons with disabilities in all development efforts should not be limited to the benefits they can derive from development. Rather, it is also imperative that persons with disabilities be increasingly represented in the management of development activities and organizations at all levels.

12. The promotion of decent work is one of the key factors in ensuring that persons with disabilities benefit from development on an equal basis with others, and are included in guiding and implementing the development agenda. Studies have shown that in developing countries, 80-90 per cent of persons with disabilities of working age are unemployed, whereas in industrialized countries, the figure is between 50 and 70 per cent.[8] Access to education and training, access to microcredit schemes and entrepreneurial opportunities, inclusive and non-discriminatory human resources policies, reasonable accommodation in the workplace, and anti-discrimination legislation are some of the key factors that contribute to the creation of equal opportunities in the open job market for persons with disabilities. Employers often resist employing persons with disabilities because they believe persons with disabilities will be unable to fully perform their tasks and responsibilities and will raise labour costs. However, evidence shows that persons with disabilities have high performance ratings and retention rates, as well as better attendance records than their colleagues without disabilities.[7]

13. The International Labour Organization (ILO) has issued numerous publications focused on the objective of decent work and the socio-economic integration of persons with disabilities. For example, in 2002, ILO published *Disability and Poverty Reduction Strategies*[9] to "contribute to the economic empowerment of persons with disabilities living in poverty by complementing the social protection approach proposed by the (World Bank poverty reduction strategy paper) Sourcebook", which includes guidance on including disability issues during the poverty reduction strategy paper process.

14. Institutional capacity-building is another important feature in integrating disability issues into development programming. The staff of Governments, the United Nations system, donor agencies, educational institutions, and civil society organizations need to be educated and equipped with the knowledge and skills to understand disability issues and to create programming and environments that promote the full participation of persons with disabilities.

15. Within the United Nations system, there are efforts under way to promote the awareness, knowledge, and integration of disability issues. These include General Assembly resolution 61/106, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to implement progressively standards and guidelines for the accessibility of facilities and services of the United Nations system, including major renovations to United Nations buildings. The Secretary-General is addressing these standards and guidelines in three main areas: information, including information technology; human resources, including recruitment and training processes and the management of disability among staff; and the physical facilities, including access to premises for staff, delegates, and/or visitors with disabilities. An Inter-Agency Support Group for the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, as called for by the

[8] "Disabled still face hurdles in job market", *The Washington Times*, 5 December 2005.

[9] Available from http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/skills/disability/download/discp_per.pdf.

United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB), has been established, open to all agencies represented in CEB. The Inter-Agency Support Group is undertaking a joint effort to establish guidelines for including the rights of persons with disabilities in United Nations country programming.

16. The post of the Special Rapporteur on Disability of the Commission for Social Development, mandated since 1994 to monitor the implementation of the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, has also been involved in advocating for Governments to include and integrate persons with disabilities into national legislation and programming.

17. To promote effective and efficient mainstreaming of persons with disabilities in the development agenda, there is potential for a more streamlined approach to disability issues within the United Nations system, by improving the complementarity and synergy of the three main disability instruments: the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (General Assembly resolution 48/96, annex), and the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons.[10] This issue was presented in more detail in the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons (A/62/157), and is an area that may merit further discussion.

18. There is growing recognition among organizations engaged in development of the need to include persons with disabilities in development activities; however, there remains much room for expansion of such programmes, as well as for more documentation of good practices. The above-mentioned report of the Secretary-General states that the World Bank found that during the fiscal years 2002-2006 only 5 per cent of new lending commitments had a disability component (ibid., para. 11). In March 2007, the World Bank issued a guidance note to assist its projects in better incorporating the needs of persons with disabilities, integrating a disability perspective into ongoing sector and thematic work programmes, and adopting an integrated and inclusive approach to disability.[11]

III. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities as a tool for mainstreaming and development

19. There is a history of separating human rights instruments and activities from those of development. However, the Convention is intended as a human rights instrument with an explicit, social development dimension; it is both a human rights treaty and a development tool. The Convention clarifies and qualifies how all categories of rights apply to persons with disabilities, and identifies areas where adaptations have to be made in order for persons with disabilities to effectively exercise their rights, as well as areas where their rights have been violated, and where protection of rights must be reinforced. It also highlights pragmatic and

[10] General Assembly resolution 37/52 of 3 December 1982, by which the Assembly adopted the World Programme of Action as set forth in A/37/351/Add.1 and Add.1/Corr.1, annex, section VIII, recommendation I (IV).

[11] *Social Analysis and Disability: A Guidance Note: Incorporating Disability-Inclusive Development into Bank-Supported Projects* (World Bank, March 2007, available from http://siteresources.worldbank.org/DISABILITY/Resources/280658-1172606907476/SAnalysisDis.pdf.

action-oriented measures to be undertaken by States parties in support of development programmes that are inclusive of, and accessible to, persons with disabilities. This represents a paradigm shift within the development community, as it identifies disability as an issue to be considered in all programming, rather than as a stand-alone thematic issue. Within this framework, there remains room for disability-specific actions and programming, based on the needs of the specific context. The Convention obligates States parties to undertake proactively the appropriate measures to ensure that persons with disabilities participate in all facets of society, on an equal basis with others.

20. There are established efforts to mainstream human rights within the United Nations system. In the 1997 report of the Secretary-General on renewing the United Nations: a programme for reform (A/51/950 and Corr.1 and Add.1-7) he called for all entities of the United Nations system to mainstream human rights into their programmes. Subsequently, in the 2005 World Summit Outcome (see General Assembly resolution 60/1), world leaders called for closer cooperation between OHCHR and all relevant United Nations bodies (General Assembly resolution 60/1, para. 126). Among the positive milestones during this process, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has noted the adoption of an inter-agency plan on strengthening human rights-related United Nations actions at the country level, and the integration of human rights in key inter-agency policy documents and programming guidelines, such as those for United Nations resident coordinators, the United Nations Development Assistance Framework and the common country assessment.[12] Efforts are currently under way in the United Nations to include the rights of persons with disabilities and related concerns explicitly within such guidelines, and at all stages of processes including engagement, country analysis, strategic planning, and monitoring and evaluation. In response to the calls for the mainstreaming of human rights within the United Nations, a Statement of Common Understanding[13] was developed, which specifically addresses a human rights-based approach to the development cooperation and development programming by United Nations bodies.

21. Civil society organizations played an instrumental role during the negotiation process of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Continuing significant and cooperative relations among civil society, Governments, international organizations and multilateral and bilateral donors will remain a key requirement for successful development activities that benefit society as a whole.

IV. Lessons to be learned from mainstreaming gender and HIV/AIDS

22. Gender and HIV/AIDS mainstreaming have both been largely accepted as essential frameworks in international development programming, and there is much to be learned from these experiences with mainstreaming.

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[12] Written submission of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to the Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on United Nations System-wide Coherence in the areas of development, humanitarian assistance and the environment.

[13] Available from http://www.undp.org/governance/docs/HR_Guides_CommonUnderstanding.pdf.

23. The literature on both HIV/AIDS and gender mainstreaming stresses the importance of concrete, measurable actions within specific sectors and contexts, to ensure that mainstreaming efforts are actually implemented. While the term mainstreaming describes a broad-reaching goal, the actions required to achieve it consist of measurable concrete steps taken by individuals such as Government ministers, departmental heads, directors of organizations, and team leaders. Disability issues need to be incorporated into organizational policy and practice in the form of job descriptions, mission and vision statements, and budget allocations.

24. At the national level, implementation guidelines on mainstreaming HIV/AIDS stress the importance of focusing efforts not just on comprehensive national plans, but also on plans for specific sectors such as education, health, transport, food security, social services, employment, and local government.[14] Concrete plans and activities are then developed and implemented by individual actors within each sector in the context and specificities of their sector. These activities contribute to the overall national goal of integrating and including the target group. South-South cooperation efforts offer a promising opportunity for national Governments to share and benefit from such experiences.

25. The basic principles of mainstreaming efforts as described by the Division for the Advancement of Women of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and adapted here for disability, include the following:

(a) Responsibility for implementing the mainstreaming strategy is system-wide, and rests at the highest levels within agencies;

(b) Adequate accountability mechanisms for monitoring progress need to be established;

(c) Initial identification of issues and problems across all areas of activity should be such that differences and disparities between persons with and without disabilities can be diagnosed;

(d) Clear political will and allocation of adequate resources for mainstreaming — including additional financial and human resources, if necessary — are important for translation of the concept into practice;

(e) Disability mainstreaming requires that efforts be made to broaden the equitable participation of persons with disabilities at all levels of decision-making;

(f) Mainstreaming does not replace the need for targeted, disability-specific policies and programmes, and positive legislation; nor does it do away with the need for disability units or focal points.[15]

26. Integrating disability into the development agenda requires different strategies in different contexts. The Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs identifies strategies for key areas in gender mainstreaming. There are several areas that are particularly relevant within the context of persons with disabilities, namely:[16]

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[14] UNAIDS/World Bank/United Nations Development Programme, *Mainstreaming HIV/AIDS in Sectors & Programmes: an implementation guide for national responses* (Geneva, September 2005).

[15] http://www2.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/gender/newsite2002/about/defin.htm.

[16] Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, *Gender Mainstreaming: An Overview* (United Nations, New York, 2002), available from http://www.un.org/womenwatch.

(a) *Policy analysis and development.* The impact of policy decisions may vary for persons with disabilities as compared with their peers without disability. A perspective that includes persons with disabilities leads to a more informed view of policy options and impacts, as well as enables decision makers to better understand how to formulate policies that narrow the gap between persons with disabilities and their peers without disability. The goal is to ensure that disability issues are routinely included when assessing policy issues, options and impacts;

(b) *Technical assistance.* Programmes should be assessed to ensure that persons with disabilities are included, and that the manner in which activities are structured does not prevent persons with disabilities from participating and benefiting on an equal basis with others. Of equal importance is ensuring that persons with disabilities are adequately represented among the providers of technical assistance at all organizational levels;

(c) *Data collection, analysis and dissemination.* In many countries, there is a scarcity of reliable data on persons with disabilities. Capacity-building is required in order to equip researchers with the skills to design studies that will adequately gather data on persons with all types of disabilities. It is important to ensure that data-collection methods are available in a variety of accessible formats and methodologies.

27. Poverty reduction strategy papers need to be developed and written in ways that allow and promote the active participation and benefit of persons with disabilities at all stages of the process, including poverty assessment, target-setting, programme prioritization, and monitoring and evaluation planning.[17]

28. There is a risk of "mainstreaming fatigue" on the part of donors, particularly as the theory of mainstreaming is easily promoted; however, the practicalities of how to operationalize it may be perceived as more complicated. It would therefore be beneficial to document and disseminate examples of development programmes that have been created and implemented in ways that include and promote the participation of persons with disabilities. The United Nations Voluntary Fund on Disability has been and continues to be a source of funding for such efforts by NGOs.

29. There is need for research and analysis to assist policymakers in determining the appropriate balance between mainstreaming strategies and targeted disability-specific approaches, frequently referred to as the "twin-track approach". However, all efforts should be guided by the overall goal to integrate and include persons with disabilities into all aspects of development programming. Finding the appropriate methods of doing so will not be possible without the participation of persons with disabilities at every stage, as reinforced by the motto of the disability community: "Nothing about us without us".

V. Discussion points

30. **The Commission may wish to consider the following suggested discussion points:**

(a) **The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities offers an ideal opportunity to consolidate disability-related activities, and to develop**

[17] World Bank PovertyNet website, at http://povlibrary.worldbank.org/files/5301_overview.pdf.

policies and structures that ensure that persons with disabilities are mainstreamed within the United Nations system. Lessons learned from gender and HIV/AIDS mainstreaming can provide valuable guidance, and there are an increasing number of tools to inform and guide this process, which when coupled with strong political will can lead to significant positive gains;

(b) The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities also provides the opportunity for human rights and development actors to actively combine and integrate these two areas. New and innovative thinking and collaboration are required to utilize the Convention so as to bring the maximum benefit to persons with disabilities and society. It is both a human rights and a development instrument that elucidates how all categories of rights apply to persons with disabilities, and identifies practical measures to create development programmes that are inclusive of, and accessible to, persons with disabilities;

(c) Halfway to the Millennium Development Goals target date of 2015, persons with disabilities remain conspicuously absent from programming and discourse on achievement of the Goals. Persons with disabilities represent approximately 10 per cent of the world's population. Eighty per cent of persons with disabilities live in developing countries, and the failure to include and integrate them in all development activities will mean failure to achieve the Millennium Development Goals;

(d) Employers often resist employing persons with disabilities because of discriminatory attitudes and practices and the mistaken belief that employees with disabilities will necessarily entail high costs for the employer. The truth is that the cost of accommodating workers with disabilities can be minimal, with many requiring no special accommodation at all.[18] Ensuring that persons with disabilities can access decent work is of critical importance in order for them to be represented in the development agenda on an equal basis with others;

(e) Increased access to data and statistics will increase the ability to ensure that programmes are targeting the areas of greatest need. The development and dissemination of such data, as well as knowledge including good practices, lessons learned, and sources of expertise, will assist all actors in the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities at the local, national and international levels;

(f) The integral involvement of civil society, including of organizations of persons with disabilities, in national and international mechanisms is an essential ingredient in effectively guiding the development agenda towards integrating and including persons with disabilities.

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[18] Information on the 2007 International Day of Disabled Persons, "Decent work for persons with disabilities", from the United Nations Enable website, at http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=110.